

LD 2877

1843

LD 2877

.2

1843

Copy 1

AN ADDRESS

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

WASHINGTON AND FRANKLIN

LITERARY SOCIETIES

OF

LA FAYETTE COLLEGE,

EASTON, PENNSYLVANIA,

AT THE

EIGHTH ANNUAL COMMENCEMENT,

SEPTEMBER 20, 1843.

BY WM. A. PORTER, A. M.
OF PHILADELPHIA.

EASTON:

PRINTED AT THE SENTINEL OFFICE.

1843.

L 2877
2
1843

LAFAYETTE COLLEGE, Sept. 20, 1843.

Respected Sir:

In behalf of the respective societies, which we represent, we present you their sincere thanks, for your eloquent and highly interesting address delivered before them this afternoon, and earnestly request a copy of the same for publication. Yours, sincerely,

SAMUEL S. CLARK,
JAMES S. REESE,
CHARLES BRODHEAD,

Committee Washington Society.

PHILIP JOHNSON,
ROBERT J. WRIGHT,
D. V. SIMPSON,

Committee Franklin Society.

EASTON, September 20, 1843.

Gentlemen:

In obedience to your request, I have the honor to enclose a copy of the address delivered before your societies, this afternoon. Having been written more for the purpose of testifying my respect for your societies, than for any other object, you are at liberty to make whatever use of it, may be supposed to advance their interests. If upon closer examination, it should be found less worthy of the terms prompted by your feelings of personal kindness,— be good enough to recollect, that it was thrown together, not amid the leisure and retirement favorable to literary pursuits, but at short intervals, snatched from such care and excitement as one of the author's age, seldom happens to encounter.

Begging you to present to your societies, my cordial thanks for this mark of their favor,

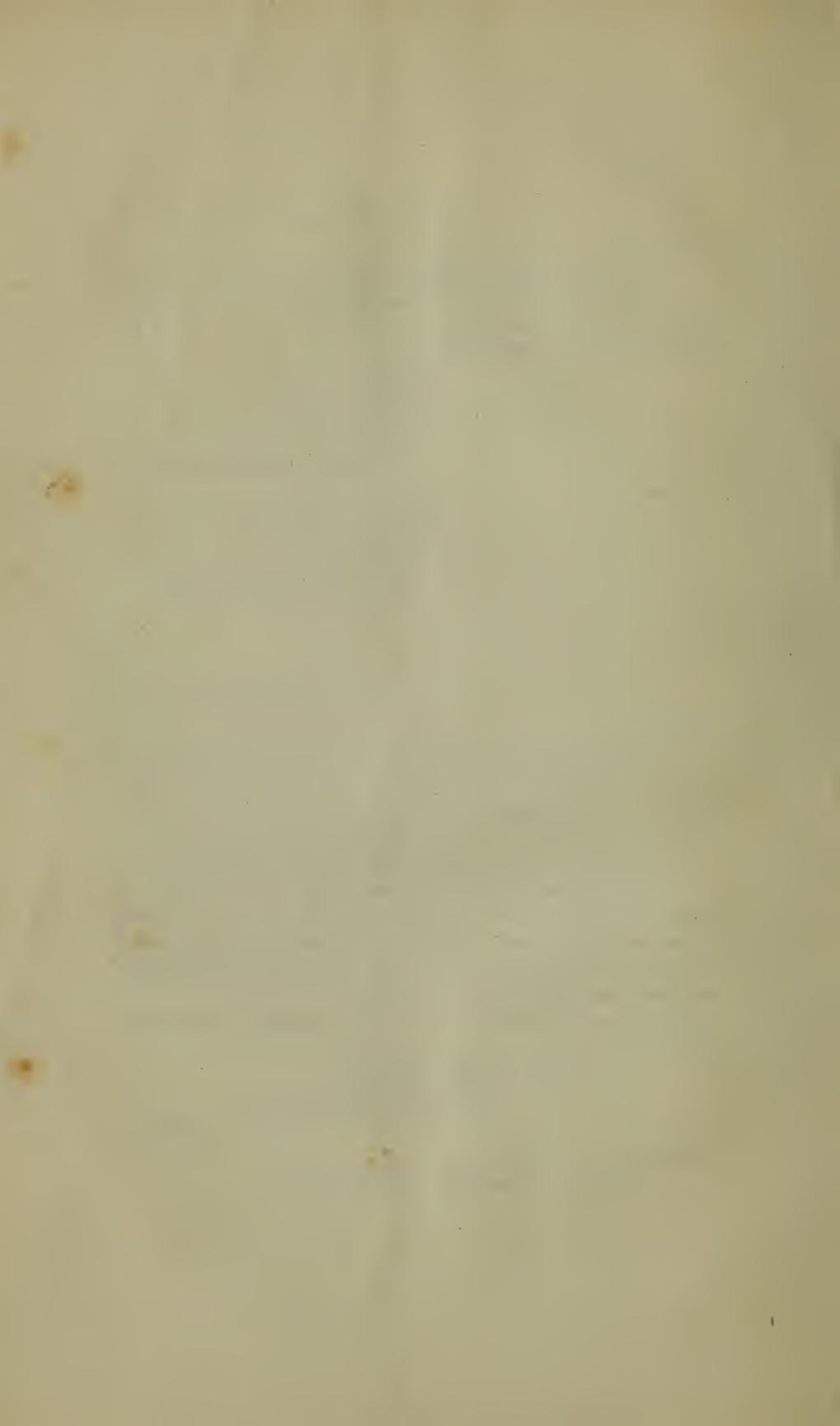
I remain, gentlemen, most truly,

Your friend and obedient servant,

WM. A. PORTER.

To Messrs. SAMUEL S. CLARK,

PHILIP JOHNSON, and others, Committees.



ADDRESS.

*Gentlemen of the Washington and
Franklin Literary Societies:*

IN an age like the present, I presume it may be safely affirmed, that the improvement of the mind, is the noblest of all employments. Until that immortal principle loses its control over brute matter, and men cease to sigh after happiness, no murmur, but one of approbation, shall attend the assent yielded to such a doctrine. The effects of the mind's expansion upon the individual man, as well as upon his social condition, are recorded in the history of the past in letters of light. From what source, if not from this, come his dignity and importance? Why, if not on this account, do his pleasures exceed so vastly, both in number and degree, those of other animals of the creation? Wherein is he more exalted and more happy, than those who have preceded him on the stage of life, and now sleep in death,—but in the results produced by his own mighty intellect? This is true of man as mortal; of him as immortal, the same truth may be spoken with emphasis. Whatever a false philosophy may assert, it cannot be that the mind, here enlarged and cultivated almost to the extent of its powers, shall in that other state of being to which we hasten, take its place among the meanest of its fellows, and be compelled to start afresh in the pursuit of knowledge. The idea is absurd and delusive. The history of man shows that knowledge is progressive;

and that every idea acquired, must tell in fearful ratio upon his happiness or misery, unless he be entirely destroyed. Hence the importance and the majesty of the scholar's occupation! These are thoughts that nerve his arm to deeds of greater daring, than "flood" or "field" ever sees. Whoever can forget them, is no worthy worshipper at your common shrine,—no worthy participator in your common joys!

Connected with these general remarks on the subject of mental culture, and, as I hope, nearly enough allied to them to warrant this introduction, is one which will be dwelt upon at greater length; namely, that *the human mind has never been so successfully cultivated, nor produced fruits so abundant, as where opportunities for improvement have been fewest.* With this speculation, somewhat curious in itself, and, if true, somewhat important in its consequences, it is proposed to occupy a share of your attention. A few reflections on *the duties owed on this account, to those who seek intellectual advancement,* together with an attempt to point out *the roads which conduct to it,* form the balance of the draft, designed to be made on your patience.

I. But in what mode are we to investigate the subject? I answer, in the same that every truth sought to be placed on a solid foundation, must be investigated. How does the merchant settle in his own mind, the laws of trade? How does the professional man establish those grave propositions, that are to influence the minds of others? How does the chemist ascertain, that oxygen is necessary to the support of animal life? How does the natural philosopher prove, that bodies are attracted towards one another

inversely as the squares of their distances? How, but by collecting numerous facts, and drawing from them all, a general conclusion. Upon this same rock, both the practical man and the philosopher, base all their conclusions in respect to the truths of life. These are the results of that great system of inductive philosophy, which boasts its origin from Lord Bacon,*—a system as simple and as sublime in itself, as its influence has been extensive, on the best interests of society. Indeed, considering its simplicity, and its importance in every department of knowledge, as well as the effect it had in subverting old systems of philosophy, and imparting a new impulse to the spirit of inquiry, we are amazed that the Greek philosophy, that mixture of fraud and superstition, should for so many centuries have swayed its sceptre over learning, and crippled, if it did not prostrate, the energies of the human mind. That men should expect to arrive at the knowledge of truth, by forming a theory of their own, and then instituting through creation, a search for facts to sustain it, is wholly unintelligible to modern minds. Happy day for the cause of truth, when these bonds were rent asunder!

* I have observed that Mr. Macauley, in that admirable performance,—his *Essay on Lord Bacon*,—finds fault with those who make Bacon the originator of Inductive Philosophy; and attempts, by a variety of reasons, to prove that “this notion is about as well founded, as that of the people who in the middle ages, imagined that Virgil was a great conjurer.” (See ‘*Miscellanies*’, Vol. 2, p. 384.) But with all deference to Mr. Macauley’s genius, it may be observed, that he misconceives entirely the sense of the terms employed. When Bacon is spoken of as the originator of the Inductive System, is meant, I fancy, not that this method has not “been practised ever since the beginning of the world,” and that too, “by the most ignorant clown, and the most thoughtless school-boy,”—but that he first exposed the absurdity of all other systems, and applied this one alone to science and philosophy. It would appear, therefore, at first sight, that although he did not implant in man the power of generalization, Bacon may be styled the originator of the system, and those who so style him, not, after all, “talk such extravagant nonsense” as Mr. M. seems to suppose.

Let us, then, refer to a few of the *great events* which mark the advancement of the race; and examine the histories of some of the *mighty men*, who have, in all ages, stood up to assert in their own persons, the rights and powers of our nature, and whose glory attracts the eye of the traveller, at every step. If these illustrious actors in the drama of life, be found springing up in the lowliest places, and finally outshining those placed by nature above them; and if in the record of the past, the progress of human genius may be traced, not down towards the earth, nor parallel with it, but up from it, and that, even under circumstances most adverse,—it will be time to search for the causes of facts, at once so novel and so full of meaning. The inquiry, if not decisive of the question, may perchance cheer the hearts, and strengthen the hands, of some of that troop of gallant youths, who are forcing their way, through toil and disappointment, to greatness and honor; and who are hurrying on to make the laws, fill the offices, and sustain the character of the Republic. If it tend, in the remotest degree, to effect this object, I shall be content.

To illustrate the countless causes, which have operated to change the face of society, for good or for evil, has given employment to the most gifted minds the race has produced. An enumeration of many of these, would be “stale” and “unprofitable”; a very few, selected from the huge mass, will answer our object. Without, therefore, referring to the ancient Republics,—your own recollections, fresher than mine, will perhaps furnish from this source, illustrations of the doctrine to be enforced,—I set down the Propagation of Christianity, as among the chief of these causes. The magnitude of this event is such, that we can with difficulty view it

fairly. Being the grandest revolution the world has ever seen, and that one whose consequences will be felt longest and most strongly ; aiming to bring into subjection the bodies and the spirits of men, to control human conduct, and to change the face of the world ; presenting in itself so strong an evidence of the truth of our religion, that we desire none stronger ; setting before us such examples of untiring energy, of long-suffering patience, of profound wisdom, of lofty eloquence, of ardent patriotism, of pure benevolence, of sublime morality, that we desire none better ;—the time will never arrive when this event shall not, in proportion as it is understood, deserve the serious attention of all the children of men. That such a work should have been committed to the hands that actually performed it, is not the least remarkable fact which it presents. Heads destined for crowns, and hands for sceptres,—men reared in the lap of science and philosophy,—those before whom nature had spread her richest treasures, and at whose beck stood the power of the law, and the purse, and the sword,—were quietly passed by, and the immortal task assigned to people, born and reared in the lowest stations of life. A few fishermen—without education,—of proverbially humble occupation—leaving behind, their implements of labor,—invoking no human assistance,—taking no thought what they should say,—and possessing a stock of personal property not amounting to a change of raiment,—step forth and execute the Divine work, while the rest of the world look on with languor, or take up the sword in bitter, unrelenting opposition. If it be objected that they were aided by a Superior Power, the argument is strengthened. They were, then, the chosen authors of the revolution.

Turn now to the history of modern Europe,—the fairest field for the investigation of any problem respecting man's existence. It is a world, of itself. The manner in which mind tottered forth in its infancy, then walked firmly, and finally leaped forth in full strength and beauty, might here be studied with accuracy, if the previous history of the world were blotted out forever. By a glance at the reformation of the sixteenth century—one of its most prominent features,—this, together with the main object of our inquiry, will be illustrated.— Considered merely as an historical fact, and without reference to its consequences,—for to discuss these properly would require too large a space,—this event is one that the intelligent student of history cannot neglect, if he would. Bullets and words, are not more different in themselves, than in the effects they produce. When, therefore, revolutions are effected by bullets and bayonets, or the fear of either, however great in themselves, or terrible in their consequences, we see their causes, imagination is shorn of its power, and we look upon them with comparatively little surprise ! Of such a character, were the extortion of the Magna Charta,— the establishment of the Commonwealth,—and the Revolution of 1688. The price of all these, either directly or indirectly, was blood. Such events, though of vast importance, and fit to be cherished while the love of freedom maintains its empire in the human heart, seldom strike us with singular awe. Not so with revolutions entirely bloodless. When by the force of reason, without the use of other weapons than the voice and the pen, and consequently without the usual resort to brute force, a change of any kind is wrought in the affairs of men,—the spectacle challenges peculiar astonishment. Of a change started and carried

on by such means, the reformation is a memorable instance. And by what hands were these weapons wielded? By JOHN HUSS, for a good portion of his life, a hired servant; by JOHN REUCHLIN, a little child, accidentally picked up by the Margrave of Baden; by ERASMUS, disowned by his father, an orphan at the age of fourteen, and, at best, an humble Monk: by ULRIC DE HUTTEN, a common soldier; by HANS SACHS, a shoemaker, who is said to have "followed his business and made verses, with equal assiduity;" by ULRIC ZWINGLE, a shepherd's boy; by PHILIP MELANCTHON, who spent his youth in the workshop of an armorer; by MARTIN LUTHER, the son of an obscure miner; by JOHN CALVIN, the descendant of an industrious cooper. Passing by the questions involved in the issue,—they must be left to abler and better hands,—and considering the extent of the work proposed to be accomplished and the means necessary for its accomplishment, as well as the long established character and learning and power of its opponents, who will deny that minds surrounded by no advantages for their developement, may produce abundant fruits?

That much discussed, but poorly understood, and still more poorly appreciated, revolution, which towards the close of the last century, convulsed to its centre the Kingdom of France, is another historical fact, from which, if it be remembered that the phenomena of human nature, form by far the most important study of mankind,—much instruction on a variety of subjects, may be drawn. To contemplate the fantastic tricks here played before High Heaven, by the most elevated classes of society; the unbridled play given to the fiercest and foulest passions that degrade our nature; the unconcern

with which men divested themselves of every affection of the heart ; the joyful faces with which they watched the gurgling of innocent blood, and were not sated ; the stupendous character of the machinery put in motion to accomplish ends, either extremely puerile or disgustingly low ; and the deliberate manner in which the axe was attempted to be laid at the root of the domestic relations, the principles of justice, order, law, government, and the very religion of God,—presenting altogether a sight only surpassed by that which meets our eye in the description of Pandemonium ; while it causes the beholder to start back with horror and disgust, also teaches him a lesson of immeasurable and invaluable practical wisdom. But unless this be followed up, by looking behind the scenes of excitement, and penetrating the characters of those infernal spirits, who guide and control all others, and whose voices are ever heard far above the crash of elements,—I mean as well of Rousseau and his co-laborers who in effect laid the plan, as of DANTON, MARAT and ROBESPIERRE who executed it,—we can never know how tremendous a power for evil, men of humble origin may wield.

But the story of the American struggle for independence, throws most light on the truth we are investigating. Such a revolution, it is true, is hard to be understood. It is one of those epochs which mark out with gratifying distinctness, the march of the human family on the road to greatness and honor ; one of the palpable evidences of that fierce struggle which the giant spirit of man, is sometimes forced to make, to shake off the load which, for a time, it has been called upon to bear. Yet its true history will never be written. No human tongue can ever recount with justice, its rise,

progress, and results,—no human hand ever erect a monument, which shall worthily proclaim and commemorate the deeds of its great actors. That noble monument lately raised upon the spot moistened by some of their best blood, if it pierced the Heavens, and were as durable as those same Heavens, would but inadequately perform its distinguished office. The attempt made to write its history, by one of our most illustrious countrymen, although it has completely identified his name with the glory of his country, is at best a splendid failure. The theme was beyond the perfect grasp even of such an intellect. How, indeed, shall a modern mind describe the birth of this Liberty in the gloomy caverns of the middle ages; and set out, with a power and brilliancy worthy the subject, its progress over the necks of kings, through tumult, anarchy, and blood? Who shall tell how kingly power, with its thrones and sceptres, has thus been beaten into the dust, and forever humbled? Who shall commemorate the sorrows suffered, the treasures spent, the labors borne, the sacrifices offered up, by the friends of freedom in our own clime, in asserting its dignity and importance? Who, looking with prophetic eye over the whole history of liberty, shall describe the influence which such a victory, obtained by human right over human wrong, shall always exert upon that divine cause,—how it shall humble oppressors of mankind not yet born,—how it shall heal wounds not yet inflicted,—how it shall bind up hearts not yet broken? Who, simply regarding the future history of this continent, shall calculate the influence of such an occurrence upon thought, upon science and the arts, upon commerce, upon religion, upon law? But if the subject be thus difficult of comprehension to us, what must it have been to those who

directed the movement; and who must they have been that formed the project? After this lapse of time, and in the condition which love of country at present holds, every allowance may be made for the enchantment which distance lends to the view, and but an imperfect estimate be formed of their characters. That they were pre-eminently fitted for the occasion, in point both of ability and integrity, the voice of mankind has long since settled. Of their courage, the whole contest is incontrovertible evidence. That they were men of highest—purest magnanimity, no one can doubt, who has studied their acts as it became him. “There go a few millions,” was the just exclamation, when CHARLES CARROLL stamped his name on the instrument, which struck off our chains. If “the liberties of our country require their being burnt to ashes, issue the orders for that purpose immediately,” said JOHN HANCOCK, as he alluded to the whole of his valuable possessions, in the town of Boston. What men, but such as we have characterized these, could thus have spoken, and thus acted?—Look also at the personal histories of the noble forms, we see ranged round the sacred hall, from which issued the Declaration of Independence. A few of their fathers had doubtless sought the country from other causes; the repeal of the Edict of Nantes, and the barbarous measures of the Stuarts, sent the balance. It would, indeed, be a curious work to ascertain, how many of those who assisted in cancelling our indentures, on the 4th of July 1776, took their descent from the men, who brought to the block the head of CHARLES I., and afterwards chased from a throne doubly disgraced, his corrupt and cowardly son,—acts, whose parallels in point of exact justice, heroic courage, and vast benefit to society, we may search long and anxiously the

historic page and never find. It is said that one,* at least of the number, was lineally descended from a conspicuous actor in the scenes of 1649: how many more is uncertain. But the conjecture does not seem fanciful, that much of that same blood which nerved the arms of the soldiers of JOHN MILTON and OLIVER CROMWELL, also flowed in the hearts of many who engaged in this still greater and more important struggle. At all events, they sprang, for the most part, from those who had fled from a tyranny, they had not the ability to resist. As a consequence of these facts, they were men whose lives had been sustained by the bread which toil alone can purchase. Cut off from the luxuries of courts, and rich estates, and crowded capitols, and thrown upon their own resources, they had here begun life anew. When, therefore, we see the tallow-chandler's boy, and the shoemaker's apprentice, two of the most conspicuous members of the committee appointed to draft the Declaration of Independence, we feel no surprise. Nor is the feeling excited, when we discover among that august assemblage, WHIPPLE, the cabin-boy and common sailor—PAIN, the obscure school teacher—HART, FLOYD, HOPKINS, and SMITH, the industrious farmers—WALTON, the carpenter—MORTON and HUNTINGTON, the plough-boys—WILLIAMS, the town-clerk—PENN, the uneducated country boy—TAYLOR, the common day laborer—HEWES, the humble Quaker, whose parents had sought in New Jersey, a shelter from the intolerance of New England—and the vast majority of the signers of the Declaration, men who had single-handed hewed their own road to the high places, which that paper found them occupying. Fit instruments for

* Benjamin Harrison.

so glorious a work ! When did men ever make more just resistance to tyranny ! When did resistance to tyranny ever call forth better men !

How many sagacious statesmen, profound jurists, learned and exemplary divines, and devoted champions of science in all its branches, the country sprung from such a source, and declared to be free and made free by such a race of men, has since given to the world, and how many it will continue to give through coming time,—there is, most probably, no created intellect that will ever know.

We have thus examined at random, some of the great events, that have characterized the past history of the world. Other causes have contributed to its condition, less noisy in operation, and less dangerous in tendency, at which it may be instructive to glance. Among the latter, I place *Literature, Science and the Arts*. Compared to the former, these are like the gentle zephyr, which daily follows the sail with maiden constancy, and brings it at last to the hospitable haven. The others resemble fierce and sudden blasts, which, for a time, put in jeopardy the very existence of the fragile bark, but urge it on its course with ten-fold speed.

Who then have been most distinguished in Literature ? If we take the English Poets, by way of example, we find them with singular unanimity, carving their own road to eminence. Allowing memory to recur to the pleasant pursuits of other days, we recollect that the most illustrious man in the ranks was driven by poverty to deer-stealing ; that the next most illustrious, was forced by the same cause to sell for a few paltry pounds

what has since cost the world its tens of thousands ; that the author of Hudibras, was too poor in his youth to be sent to college ; that DRYDEN commenced the world poor, and, as far as its riches were concerned, left it poor ; that OTWAY followed in the same track ; that BEN JOHNSON was a brick-layer ; and that PRIOR was reared by the hands of a vintner. The famous translator of the Iliad submitted to the general destiny, and became, in the language of his biographer, “a commoner of nature, excluded from the regular modes of profit and prosperity.” SAVAGE, disowned by his parents, and cut off from all support, was *tried* by the world and *sentenced* to want and wretchedness ; THOMPSON was educated by charity ; AKENSIDE, and, long after him, HENRY KIRKE WHITE, were reared by respectable butchers ; FALCONER drew his life from a barber ; CHATTERTON had an account against a sexton, for the melancholy one which he endured ; and last, but not least, BURNS was born and educated on a farm, not more than sufficient to sustain its occupants. Thus much for the early lives of the poets, and their opportunities for improvement. They form a commentary upon the development of genius, which can never fail to instruct, whilst genius has an admirer.

The lives of the majority of prose writers, whose names cause the page of English history to shine with so rich a lustre, if examined with care, would show the same results.

The annals of German Literature, also teach a lesson in regard to mental cultivation, unworthy of neglect. They remind us constantly of regular lines of soldiers, reaching where the eye cannot see, and blending in

the distance,—their spears and helmets dancing in the sunbeams,—and all armed for the fight. If it be doubtful whether Germany have a Literature purely national, it is certain that no country has ever contained a band of more devoted and better disciplined literary warriors, or retained them for a longer period of time, in active service. True, much they have done is pernicious, and much more worthless; yet observe that ever since the accession of Charlemagne, (who imparted an impulse to literary taste that did not exhaust itself for many centuries,) down to the very day on which we speak,—a proficiency in letters, has been one grand distinctive feature in her national character. Philosophy, theology, criticism, the exact sciences, poetry, history, politics and jurisprudence, all have had their faithful advocates. To attempt to designate the circumstances in which one in a thousand of them labored, would be useless. Let this point be dismissed in the language of an able writer,* to whom all the greatness of Germany seems familiar. “It would be melancholy to study the lives of many of the most eminent German scholars, so great and so numerous were the hardships and deprivations, to which they were exposed in the commencement of their career, were it not that we almost always discern a firmness of mind, which never yielded to despondency, and the serenity and happiness proceeding from the conscious exercise of exalted talent.”

So too with the country of ROLLIN and MASSILLON and D'ALEMBERT, and ST. PIERRE and LEBRUN and an innumerable host of distinguished sons,—a country that has given to science many a persevering explorer,

* See American Quarterly Review, Vol. II, p. 177.

to religion many an able defender, to philosophy many a faithful expounder, and to literature in general, many an ardent votary,—sometimes, the sport of brutish religious and false philosophies and bastard literatures, but always the home of learning and refinement. Bid those we have named stand forth, and to them, add as many more as it seemeth good, and mark whether or not their testimony agree with that already adduced.

The victories of Science, and the champions by whom they have been gained, next demand our attention. As these achievements are eclipsed by few in splendor, so they are perhaps of all others most beneficial to man. What misery does Science not relieve? What wants does it not supply? What useless expenditure of labor does it not prevent?—How are our houses constructed? How is our clothing manufactured? How is the earth made to yield her fruits?—Who annihilates distance to suit the convenience of the farmer and the merchant? Who marks out those paths upon the sea, which never lead astray? Who penetrates space, and opens to our gaze, worlds never before conceived of by man, thus expanding our minds and ennobling our thoughts? Ask these questions of Science, and mark the replies. But where are laborers found for these manifold employments? Among kings and princes, who might command the necessary helps to instruction? Among the rich, who might, without starving their children, purchase the means of prosecuting scientific research? Among men of leisure, who might make scientific experiments, as an agreeable pastime? Among the powerful, who might defend themselves even by physical force, when attacked on account of their

opinions? Let us see. The man who discovered gunpowder, was accused of magic, and immured in a dungeon. That most scientific navigator, the discoverer of America, gained the means of accomplishing his great exploit, by beggary. What were their opportunities for improvement?—He who first announced that the earth revolved round the sun, would have burned at the stake, if the announcement had not been kept back, until his death was near at hand. What inducement was this for the prosecution of such studies?—A subsequent defender of the same system, was twice compelled by a barbarous inquisition, to abjure his belief,—although he did mutter, each time, “It moves still.” Fine stimulus that, to the spirit of inquiry!—**KEPLER**, Newton’s great precursor in Germany, is known to have passed his youth in poverty. Of the two most distinguished astronomers Great Britain has produced, one gained his first knowledge of the science, while attending the sheep of his master; and the other belonged, in his youth, to a body of foot-guards.—Botany was reduced to a science, by a shoemaker. Dr. **JOHN HUNTER**, the most accomplished surgeon, and one of the most remarkable men, his profession has given to the world, was apprenticed to a cabinet-maker. The steam engine was brought to what we call its perfection, by a maker of mathematical instruments. The most valuable improvements ever made in cotton-spinning, were made by a barber. The world has rung with the praises of a chemist, who was originally an apothecary’s apprentice. The discoverer of the mariner’s quadrant, was an humble glazier,—too weak to preserve the glory his own talent had gained him. Of the inventor of the lightning rod, either enough has been said, or enough will be said. We, therefore, conclude this part of the

subject by the fact, that the individual who put the first steamboat in motion, enjoyed only the benefit of a common school education. Unnumbered instances of a similar kind are on record ; these occur at the moment. Let it be imagined, then, what encouragements such men could have had, in the investigations of science, and what hardships they must not have endured.

In approaching the triumphs of Art—and particularly of the fine Arts—every mind is pre-occupied with the thought, that they, of all others, must owe themselves to wealth, and to the refinement and leisure which wealth can mostly command. The products of this branch of the arts take rank, neither among the necessities nor conveniences of life, but among its luxuries ; for it cannot be, that men who are shivering with cold, or suffering from hunger, will experience pleasure in the contemplation of other arts, than those which shall feed or warm them. Hence, it is among the noble and the rich alone, that we look for the votaries of art. How stands the fact ? Take Italy as a sufficient example,—for it would be impossible to enter upon numerous details. Whence come its great masters of art ? From the stations in life we have indicated ? Not a man of them. **LEONARDO DA VINCI**'s birth, was as ignominious as it was humble. **MICHAEL ANGELO**, it is true, sprang from a family of counts ; but it was not until his own branch of the house had become extremely reduced in every way, that it was able to produce so towering a genius. **CORREGIO**, with one exception, its very brightest ornament, was reared by the poorest parents, in the most obscure village, and not until long after he had studied the principles of his profession, and applied them successfully to practice, did he see a painting or a

statue, whether of the Grecian, Roman or Venetian school. Much the same was the case, nearly a century after, with CLAUDE, in whom the design of becoming a painter first implanted itself, when employed in the double capacity of a color-grinder and kitchen-boy. Style these what we may, and speculate in regard to their causes as we may, they are historical truths which no man can dispute, and which no aspirant after honorable fame can contemplate without profit, or pass unnoticed without loss.

We have so far dealt only with facts. Let us now reason from these facts to their legitimate causes. Why is it, then, that intellectual pre-eminence so often exhibits itself under circumstances, to all appearance, strangely adverse to its growth? The answer is obvious. The road to such pre-eminence is no less steep and cragged, than its summit is difficult of retention, when once reached. To the truth of this remark, the privations of the student's life,—his frustrated plans,—his broken hopes,—his untasted pleasures,—his wasted health,—are swift and willing witnesses. These, too often, constitute the price men are obliged to pay for distinction. To enable them to discharge the obligation, an abundance of resources is necessary. These resources can be obtained in no way save one. A victory over one difficulty, is but the precursor of another yet more splendid. This obtained, the remainder vanish before the steps of the conqueror, like the morning mist before the morning sun. Yet, the latter triumphs owe themselves altogether to the former. Upon the secret strength, courage, and experience derived from our first conflicts with difficulty and danger, hangs the achievement of all subsequent conquests. From

the force of habit, men become so accustomed to trample upon all that opposes their progress, and the employment becomes so agreeable, that such encounters are finally regarded but as luxuries of life, which it is their privilege to enjoy. A belief in his own invincibility takes up its abode within the man,—imperceptible to those around, except by its effects,—but strong as the love of existence, and deep-rooted as the fiercest passion. The enjoyment of life is even sweetened by the business of crushing, or if not that, overthrowing whatever obstacles may chance to beset the path his eye has marked out. Upon the same principle, many of the victories won by the French army under Napoleon, explicable on no other, are easily accounted for. When the same spirit is carried into the literary world, how can any man fail? But another question,—in what mode can the man's nature become so moulded, unless he begin in a lowly condition in life, and hew his way up? To expect to see these principles of action flourishing and growing in the bosom of one, nursed in the arms of ease, would be to expect the oak that has graced the mountain top for half a century, suddenly to transport itself to the hot-house, and gather new strength from the change.—Nature has decreed otherwise. Her whole course is otherwise. Her trees grow gradually. Her rivers, instead of bursting from the rock at once, are formed by frequent accessions of strength. The fruits upon which her children are nourished, are not those of a day,—but the results of numerous showers and sunshines, and of much care and watchfulness. So in the animal kingdom, men are born, not giants, but helpless infants: whether or not they fulfil the high purposes of their creation, must depend upon the severe training through which, either they force

themselves, or are forced by circumstances, to pass.—Here, I trust, are the fact and the explanation.

Let it not be concluded from this, that, in order to improve successfully the mind, all opportunities ought to be carefully shut out. We have uttered nothing that will support such unpardonable nonsense. Let every help to this end be greedily seized upon : but let us, after all, be thankful that the mind of man has been made thus free, and thus capable of enlarging its powers, regardless of its outward circumstances ! Let us rejoice that the spirit of man depends for its advancement in knowledge and goodness, not so much upon its fellows, nor upon the circumstances in which it is situated, as upon its own native and imperishable strength ! Let us rejoice that Heaven has placed it beyond the reach of

——— the whips and scorns of time,
The oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely !

Let us clap our very hands for joy, that no outward danger, however appalling,—no force, however great,—no chains, however strong,—no hunger, however keen,—no physical suffering, however acute,—no exercise of arbitrary power, however base,—no death, however cruel,—can blot out that immortal principle, or crush its Heaven-born energies, or retard its Heaven-ward progress.

II. I have spoken of some of the scenes through which men pass, in drawing out the powers of their minds. There is one inference from this, which would seem to deserve marked attention :—let no man, upon pain of forfeiting the respect of his fellows, attempt by

word or deed, to crush the energies of any mind. I speak not now of the attempts made by the tyrants of the earth, to stop the progress of knowledge. These, it is true, have been frequent and cruel, but so utterly impotent as only to deserve contempt. I speak of the efforts of the individual man for improvement. Despicable indeed, and beyond all power of language to describe, must he be, who could, by an unkind word or act, retard such efforts. It is an outrage which no man has the right to commit. In a country where perfect equality is the birth-right of every citizen, this doctrine ought to be well understood. In such a country, too, we need the boldest spirits nature can produce; and upon them, a high premium ought always to be set. We want no one who has grown up under the dread of any master. Then, again, who but he that has passed through it, can ever know the nature of the battle which the student is continually fighting with himself? We read with astonishment of those of the olden time, who were wont to spend whole lives in the vain search after the philosopher's stone; and we expend our powers of ridicule upon their folly. The ranks of literature have often exhibited a folly, in some respects, scarcely less strongly marked. Yet these very labors, cast about the student's life a chief attraction. What sight is there in our vast creation, fuller of moral grandeur than that of a youth of tender age, without money, without friends, without counsel to guide him, without patronage to sustain him, without books to instruct him, without kind words to cheer him, forcing his way up from ignorance to knowledge, and consequently, to greatness? In such a course, there is a heroism, which, in a revolution, would exalt the possessor into the idol of the State,—on the field of battle,

would render his arm stronger than a Macedonian phalanx,—and in the council-chamber, make him the arbiter of nations. There is an absence of display,—a respect for the opinions of others,—a gentleness and timidity blended with a firm reliance on himself, which must always command the highest admiration and applause. When it is known that this is not the impulse of a moment, but the cool and settled purpose and considerate action of years, our admiration is not abated. Nor does it suffer any check, when we go further, and reflect upon the silent character of the labor he performs; and the fact that most men could stand at the stake in the face of a crowd, to whom, when unobserved, slight suffering or exertion would be intolerable.—The consoling belief is entertained by many, that the illustrious dead look down from their happy homes, upon the world they have left, and are acquainted with its affairs. If this be so, it is difficult to conceive of the thrilling interest, with which one of that countless number of pure spirits who have themselves trodden the same path, must regard the progress of such a man, of the more than common joy which every successive triumph must impart.—How then dare any man attempt to damp the ardor of so generous a spirit? How dare he say, “I am stronger, or wealthier, or of better understanding than thou; take thou a mere lowly place,—this was made for me; aim thou at a more humble mark,—this thou canst not strike?” I know very well that the purest and best man, is always in the power of the worst of his species. I know that the most loathsome reptile that crawls the earth, may cut down in an instant, the stoutest defender of his country, or the gravest philosopher who ministers to her wants. But I know also, that the mere possession of power by

no means implies the right to exercise it. Why, then, should those who are placed above him, by the accident either of age, or power, be permitted, in any manner, to darken the scholar's prospects? Indeed, observing his personal character, the motives of his actions, and the effect of his pursuits upon human happiness, why should not every hand be ready to assist him, and every heart to sympathize with him? And, yet, after all, it is not idle to suppose, that many a genius far more lofty and more brilliant than any the world has seen, may have been struck down by that world's coldness and neglect.

These remarks address themselves, in some measure, to the instructors of youth. If neglect has been the assassin of genius, not a few of its children have fallen by hands that should have cherished and protected them. Harsh treatment has quenched the ardor, and daunted the courage, and destroyed the self-reliance, of many a youth, who, but for that, would have covered with honor those from whom it was received; and many another, who, but for that, would have made, if not striking, at least respectable, attainments in literature. There was a time when it was imagined, that no idea could be successfully imparted to the youthful mind, unless the body were at the same time made to suffer. Happily, this state of things is passing away. The best schools, now, are those from which bodily torture has been wholly banished; and where reason has resumed the mild, but powerful, sway, to which, by the laws of nature, she possesses so clear a title. Yet this is among the least gorgeous of the triumphs, which modern Humanity, guided by the genius of Christianity, has succeeded in achieving. Turn where we may, we

behold her, not adorned with spoils snatched by force, but with the emblems of peace and gentleness,—not crushing her foes beneath her wheels, but by the very act of victory, changing them to friends,—not treading out the precious sparks of liberty, which God hath deposited in their hearts, but, by her very breath enkindling there, a living, burning flame,—and dispensing, as she rolls on to other battles, every soul-cheering, life-giving fruit which charity and mercy, (blessed friends of man!) have ever supplied for his support. If he be in want or sickness, Humanity relieves his necessities, and mollifies his wounds with ointment. If he be perishing in a distant land for lack of spiritual knowledge, she traverses Oceans to spread out before him the bread of life. To him who would destroy himself by vice, she speaks in the soft notes of a mother's voice, and withdraws him from temptation. On him, too, in whose bosom reason no longer holds its throne, her gentle influences descend like the dew of Heaven, imparting health, strength and freshness, wherever they touch. Even in our mode of punishing the unhappy criminal, and in our treatment of the unfortunate, but honest debtor, reason and kindness have put to flight the cruelty of darker ages, and occupy for the first time their rightful places. It would be hard if the lot of the inquirer after knowledge, should remain unchanged ; and he alone come not within the sphere of this elevated and comprehensive Christian philanthropy.

When we speak of the struggles men make, and the hardships they endure, in attaining distinction by the force of mind, suppose not that this is the fate of a few born to misfortune ; to call it the unavoidable destiny of all

who would rise above the mass of their fellows, would be truer. Let this be illustrated by a bright “example, to our purpose quite.” A poor printer’s boy stands before his *case*, with sallow complexion and thoughtful brow. Discontented with the home of his youth, or, peradventure, moved already by the hidden workings of the spirit, which is yet to exalt and ennable his name among all the men who worship genius, he leaves the spot which gave him birth, and becomes a silent, poverty-stricken wanderer in a distant State. For a few years we lose sight of him, and find him owning a printing press, and possessing the “pen of a ready writer.” An interval of a few more years elapses, and that pen is enlightening the minds of his countrymen on the subject of their freedom. As a proof of the confidence reposed in his integrity, ability and devotion to the cause of the colonies, he is sent in person, first to expostulate with, and then in the name of his country, to hurl threats in the face of, its bitter and unreasonable enemy. The influence of that series of brilliant scientific exploits of which he was the author, had already begun to be felt by the world ; they put in a claim to his greatness, which is unresisted by the generation then on the stage ; and posterity bows to its justice, in submission and admiration. Thus his fame has become the property of mankind.—These are the prominent features of his history ; and dazzled by their splendor, these are the only facts, of which the mass of men are ever informed. But where, I ask, is the true account of his rise ? Where are his secret thoughts,—where the disappointments, the discouragements, the heart-sickness, the fruitless and soon forgotton struggles, which beset his path ? The triumphs are written ; where are the failures ? Did no temptations and defeats lie along that

road of toil, which he was appointed to run? Did the elements so far forget their character, as to be tamed without an effort? Was his career as a politician,—bright as it appears,—entirely unchequered? Little do they know of human nature, who can thus think. History has not recorded most of the difficulties which marked his course, and it is right they should be forgotten. Such is the life of the statesman and the scholar.

Look for a further illustration of the fact, at the life of the statesman and the warrior,—whose greatness is certainly not less intellectual, than that which spends its strength over books. I am carried back to the same glorious era, we have left. My eye rests upon a strippling, who traverses with hasty step the fields of Virginia, and bears in his hands, the chain and the compass. His descent is taken from respectable parents of moderate means. Of one of these, nature has deprived him; but left him a stout heart and a vigorous constitution; and for the rest, he trusts to his right arm and to God. Having acquired a knowledge of the mathematics, his own spirit and his country's danger drive him to the profession of arms. His skill, courage, and integrity place him in enviable comparison with officers of highest rank, and largest experience, and mark him out a candidate for greater military honors. The first drum regularly beat in that dread conflict which is to make his country free, is beat at his command. Victory followed by victory builds up for him a reputation tarnished by no defeat which human skill could avert, and places before men of arms, an instance of vast disproportion between results and the means of their accomplishment,—the best rule by which military exploits can be measured,—such as cannot be found in all previous European wars.

Even the celebrated “seven years” war, that most wonderful exhibition of skill, and bravery, and all the arts of generalship, presents no such instance.—Thus resisted, subdued, and humbled, the mother country abandons the unequal contest; and that of our birth takes her place among the free nations of the earth. Then arrives the occasion for that sublimest act of which man has yet conceived. Amid the assembled representatives of the people, the sacred commission accepted in time of danger, is resigned in time of peace; and the man who could have taken his seat on a throne, and worn a crown, and wielded a sceptre, returns to the ranks of the people, a private citizen! God-like act, when will the eyes of man behold thy parallel! From this retreat, he is called to assist in framing a Constitution for the new-born republic, and to preside over the Convention constituted for that purpose,—beyond all doubt, the most learned, liberal, and enlightened body ever assembled on the continent which contains us. This done, another call of graver import reaches him, and he goes to put in motion, the newly devised and novel form of government. Eight years of toil and excitement pass away, each marked by a depth of sagacity, a strength of patriotism, and a vastness of comprehension rarely excelled, and the warrior-statesman voluntarily lays down his power at the feet of the people, and shortly after, lays down his body in the grave.—This is the picture history presents us; and impious the hand that would mar its proportions or its coloring. But where, let me ask, is the other portion of the history? Did he encounter no painful struggles, in reaching his first post of distinction? Did he endure nothing at Brad-dock’s defeat? Was that no occasion of trial, when, at one time, in the face of the nation, a strong party had

secretly banded together, to exalt over his head, an officer * of subordinate rank, then commanding the northern portion of the army? Did no grief and mortification rend that heart, when towards the close of his civil administration, he saw himself deserted by those whom his hand had fed,—his acts wilfully misrepresented—and all the means made use of to pull down that high character, which malice and thwarted ambition could invent? To say so, would be to deify our great political parent. *Man is made to struggle*, is the law under which life is held; and he but submitted to the common lot. It is joyful to know, however, that in the light of history these facts are viewed but as the dust of the balance; and rightly so. The fairest monument ever reared by human hands, would appear comparatively mean, if the sight re-called to mind, the mode and the difficulties of its construction, instead of the magnificence of the whole.

III. Having discoursed of what men have achieved by exertion, and of what is due to those who thus endeavor to exalt their condition in life, an important question remains to be answered, before the previous suggestions, can be of practical utility. Taking these things for granted, how is this intellectual distinction to be obtained?

1. I answer, that the first requisite either for individual happiness, or the ability to accomplish anything great or good, is LABOR. Apart from all other considerations, it is a duty commanded by the highest authority, recognised by intelligent beings: “Six days,”—not

* Horatio Gates.

mayest thou,—but “shalt thou labor;” and if the wisdom of a command were ever inferrible from the effects of its observance, that of this one, is clearly established. On every fibre of the body, in every human want, in every effort of the understanding, in every great event, the necessity of labor is plainly visible. By labor, the bodily frame is invigorated, life is prolonged, and the earth made to yield, not only the fruits which minister to our enjoyment, but those also on which existence depends: hence, its high place in every well received system of political economy. By labor, the capacities of the mind are developed; science, art, and commerce flourish; cities rise; and sails flap on every sea. Such being the intrinsic value of labor, it is not strange that mankind should have stamped upon its face, their opinion of its worth. By common consent, mere physical labor has been invested with a dignity, which makes the laborer more than a lord. In literary pursuits, it is much the same. Let the author produce a romance, a book without a reference, betraying no thought but the thought of the moment,—and though it be more brilliant in conception, and more elegant in style, than all that have preceded it, if read, it will be read but to be forgotten. But let him produce in his book, the results of research, and of learning, and of painful and long continued toil, and that book will survive both him and his generation, and no man will mention his name but with respect and gratitude. For the same reason, if the performances of the Divine, or the Lawyer, evince no pains, no study, no laborious investigation, it matters little how daintily the dishes be served up, they must pall upon the appetite of the hearer; and the first will be preparing addresses to empty benches, while the second is bellowing to the

walls of the most inferior courts. What is this, I ask, but the testimony of all mankind voluntarily rendered to the excellency of labor?—In addition, labor is a positive luxury; and, unlike other luxuries, one, of which a surfeit is rarely obtained. Forming as it does, the only road to rest and enjoyment, its absence would render life an insupportable burden.

Like a coy maiden, Ease, when courted most,
Farthest retires.

It is not, therefore, by fatiguing her with attentions which have already failed to prove agreeable, but by imitating that cautious policy resorted to in some other instances, and forming an intimacy with her grand enemy and rival,—that she can ever be surely won.—It may, therefore, be assumed as an inexorable law of our nature, written on every part of it, and one whose wisdom daily experience confirms, that, *to live is to labor.*

In all countries, this doctrine will hold good; in our own, particularly so. Every citizen of a Republic, has two great incentives to labor. *First*, it is here the highway to honor. Under such a form of government, public opinion commands and forces men to labor, and scouts them when they refuse. It is thus, that while many of our Trans-Atlantic brethren are enabled to live without habits of industry, and to enjoy the respect of their fellow-men, such instances with us are peculiarly rare.—*Secondly*, labor is the great antagonist of aristocracy. It is the province of the latter, to look down upon the former. Its very essence is a contempt for it; its whole business to crush it; its effect, to set before the world examples of indolence, more inimical to its

happiness, than a thousand plagues. Inasmuch, therefore, as luxury and perfect liberty, whose price is "eternal vigilance," are entirely incompatible, it is evident that liberty can have no more faithful and valuable handmaid than labor.

2. The second road to eminence, and the only remaining one I shall notice, lies through VIRTUE ; if these two paths do not conduct to honorable fame, it will puzzle the ingenuity of the wisest, to find those which do.—The doctrine, that virtue is necessary to the stability of society, is hardly truer than trite. The whole history of man speaks on this subject, a voice that never can be other than wilfully misunderstood. The pre-eminent necessity for its existence in a Republic, is also inscribed on the past, as by the hand of a giant. When those who compose the government are vicious, how can it be administered ? When the laws are invaded, and the murderous arm is raised, and property becomes insecure, and grim Anarchy stands close at hand, bestowing a ghastly smile upon the scene, who shall speak peace to the storm ? Do you approach the pulpit ? That is occupied by the people,—and though a peculiar people, —still by the people. Do you call upon the press to open its artillery ? That is controlled, in a high degree, by the popular will. Do you call upon the officers of justice ? They are a part of the people. Do you turn to the army ? They form another portion. How, then, can a Republic sustain itself, unless sustained by virtuous members ? But it is not so much of this I speak, as of the tendency of virtue to produce individual happiness and elevation. The position is as true in the one case, as in the other. Not to mention physical results, the time consumed in the practice of vice would

rob the votary of letters, of all chance of final triumph. In the pursuit of any branch of literature, and particularly that of poetry or eloquence, there can be little doubt, that purity of thought is one of the first elements of success. Impurities of the blood prostrate the body, not more speedily nor surely, than grovelling thoughts, the mind. We are told that the frequent contemplation of the beautiful in the physical world, will even leave its traces on the human countenance. Why should not the contemplation and the practice of virtue, also exalt and purify the mind, and fit it for higher flights? That there are those who pursue the opposite course with success, is no good argument to the contrary. This is an instance of the most common, as well as the most fatal, errors in human logic. The result is here produced, not by means of vice, but in despite of it. If a modern steamer bearing a burden of a thousand tons, outstrip a merchant vessel carrying but five hundred,—how absurd were it to attribute the excess of speed, to the excess of the cargo! In one respect, the cases are parallel.—As a matter of mere policy then, the student ought to be a man of more than Spartan virtue. His struggles and his hopes demand this. When, however, by the practice of its kindly offices, his kindred and his country are made happier, and he is rendered more able to bear the ills that flesh is heir to: when he reflects with St. PIERRE, that “nothing is durable, virtue alone excepted. Personal beauty passes quickly away; fortune inspires extravagant inclinations; grandeur fatigues; reputation is uncertain; talents, nay genius itself, are liable to be impaired; but virtue is ever beautiful, ever diversified, ever equal, and ever vigorous, because it is resigned to all events, to privations as to enjoyments, to life as to death:” when, too, he recog-

nises the close connexion between virtue and that sublimest of all faiths, of which only the spirit of man can partake and live ;—that faith which can rescue him from the

—Dark
Illimitable ocean, without bound,
Without dimension,

in which vice finally plunges her victims ;—and that faith which can spread out before him a bright, and beautiful, and happy future :—these are considerations that absolute madness alone would reject.

I have thus, gentlemen, addressed you on such topics, as I thought might interest, by touching your daily pursuits ; might cheer those who seek improvement, even in the midst of hardship, by pointing out examples of success ; and might tend to raise the general estimate of knowledge, by showing the difficulties of its acquisition. Let me not conclude without reminding you of the country in which we dwell ; of the scope she presents for the successful developement of every mental power ; and of the right she possesses, to insist on the correct use of the knowledge we acquire. Fair are her fields ; rich her soil ; benign her laws ; exalted her past career ; wide her fame ; free the minds and the limbs of her sons ; courageous and warm their hearts. Let us be grateful to such a mother. Let it be our object, by virtuous lives, to add to the lustre of her name.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 028 342 629 4